

❧ All the Comforts of Home ❧



The Perkins Bull Hospital for
Convalescent Canadian Officers
1916-1919
London, England



Cover: Wm. Perkins Bull and the Voluntary Aid Detachment at the official opening of the Hospital in July, 1916. (PAMA)

Unless otherwise noted, the material referenced is from the Perkins Bull Hospital records,
part of the Wm. Perkins Bull fonds at the Peel Art Gallery, Museum and Archives,
on long-term loan from the Perkins Bull Foundation.

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McMaster University Library for their gracious reproduction of the photograph on page 12.
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▲ Canada's flag during the WW1, the Red Ensign. (PAMA)



▲ The Union Jack, flag of Great Britain during the conflict. (PAMA)



THE BULLS IN ENGLAND

William Perkins Bull grew up on a family farm near Brampton in Peel County (now the City of Brampton). He attended Brampton High School, the University of Toronto, and Osgoode Hall. A successful lawyer, he was said to be one of the youngest to receive the designation of King's Counsel in the British Empire. He developed business and financial interests in the Canadian west, Cuba, and the Channel Islands. He married Maria Brennan in 1897 and, in 1912, moved his young family to England in order to connect with potential English investors.

The Bulls lived near Wimbledon in Putney Heath, a prestigious area of London. Their large Tudor-revival house, known as "Wynnfield,"¹ had been home to Sir Ernest Shackleton, the famed Antarctic explorer.²

WAR

When, in response to its invasion of Belgium, Great Britain declared war on Germany in 1914, Canada was automatically involved as a sister Dominion of the British Empire. All across the country, volunteers signed up for active service, and received training before transport to England and France. In England, the always-patriotic Bull volunteered, but at age 44 and with six young children, was ruled ineligible for active service. He returned to Wynnfield disappointed but determined to somehow contribute to the war effort.

As WW1 intensified, troop traffic through nearby London increased and hotels filled quickly. Canadian soldiers often had difficulty finding places to stay. As soon as the Bulls understood this situation, they considered the empty bedrooms at Wynnfield. With all but one of their children away at boarding school, Maria noted that they had room to spare and proposed opening their home to Canadian soldiers.



A GRACIOUS INVITATION

The Bulls purchased extra furniture such as beds and washstands, and then contacted the major hotels looking for Canadian officers in need of accommodation. Word soon spread among the men, and the Bull home became full to overflowing each night. At times guests slept on chairs and couches as well as in every available bed.

One of these visitors was Grant McKeough, a Canadian officer from Chatham, Ontario, in London for naval training. A friend of his parents introduced the young man to the Bulls. Like so many others, McKeough immediately felt at home and returned at every opportunity. He would later write that he wished he was seeing more of England, “but Mrs. Bull is so wonderfully good to me that I always go there every chance I get.”³

◀ The Conservator (Brampton),
August 1914. (PAMA)



Grant McKeough, around 1917. (PAMA)



The dining room and parlour used by guests and visiting officers. (PAMA)

HELPING CANADIANS

In 1915, Canadian troops faced the first use of chlorine gas. Their tenacity and bravery in the face of this new horror earned them the respect of their fellow soldiers. At the same time, the reality of war was affecting the officers in charge of troops in a number of ways. While Bull encouraged conversation amongst the men, Maria listened thoughtfully. As she heard the men discussing conditions at the Front, she realized that although British officers could convalesce at home before returning to battle, Canadians had nowhere to go. Her home was already crowded with nightly guests – the only solution would be to acquire additional accommodation in order to create a convalescent hospital.

She and Bull were aware that an adjacent house was empty. Bull noted in his memoirs that acquiring a lease on the house owned by a family from Liverpool was done without fuss, as was fitting it out to hospital standards.

Bull was concerned that, although numerous convalescent hospitals were being established, some of his neighbours would not appreciate his charitable gesture. Most such establishments were in the countryside in commodious estate homes. While residents lauded the principle of the



Solomon J. Solomon, R.A.
William Perkins Bull, oil on canvas, around 1920.
(PAMA)



Solomon J. Solomon, R.A.
Maria Brennan Bull, oil on canvas, around 1920.
(PAMA)

hospital, they did not want it in their neighbourhood. Bull's handwritten memoirs note "thus my family, my home and my hospital were socially boycotted".⁴ In a subsequent typescript version of his memoirs he called it a 'tempest in a teapot', and suggested that the patriotic ardour of the young ladies in the area, many of whom wanted to volunteer at the hospital caring for the "handsome and chivalrous" Canadian officers, did much to quell his neighbours unrest over the matter.⁵

THE PERKINS BULL HOSPITAL FOR CONVALESCENT CANADIAN OFFICERS

Undaunted, the Bulls thoroughly refitted the empty house with upgrades to heating, lighting, and plumbing. They renovated bathrooms and the kitchen. Along with hospital beds, stands, and other medical furnishings, they acquired a dining table that could accommodate 44 people.

Medical care during the war consisted of casualty clearing stations in the field, and military hospitals behind the lines and in England. The last steps in treatment, if required, were at small convalescent hospitals, and it was this model the Bull establishment emulated. Affiliated with Queen

Alexandra's Military Hospital, the Perkins Bull Hospital had a medical staff and 20 women from the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD). Financial support came from the Bull family, the Canadian government, private donors, and the Masonic Lodge.

The Perkins Bull Hospital for Convalescent Canadian Officers opened in July, 1916. The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress of London were the guests of honour. Other guests included the Surgeon General Carson Jones, and Sir Robert McBride, Agent-General for British Columbia. After the official opening, the visitors moved to a large marquee for tea. Union Jacks, the Canadian ensign, and red, white and blue



bunting moved in the breeze of a sunny day. A string band played in the background.

One of the first patients transferred to the hospital was Lieutenant Georges Vanier, a soldier with the Royal 22nd French Canadian Battalion. In a letter dated July 2, 1916, he wrote his mother that he had been sent to "a hospital



Richard Jack, R.A. Dorothy Bull, oil on canvas, around 1918. (PAMA)



which is really not a hospital but a home,” and noted “Mr. Perkins Bull has provided the officers with every comfort and every convenience.”⁶

WHY OFFICERS ONLY?

Historically, officers came from the upper class of society. They were considered intelligent, well-trained and suited to giving orders. The working class provided soldiers and labourers whose job was to follow orders. Changes to the system, whereby rank was awarded for intelligence and performance, began during WW1 but did not really take hold until WW2. Separating injured men and their officers was then considered normal and necessary for the morale of both.

VOLUNTARY AID DETACHMENT

Fourteen young Canadian women were voluntary workers at the hospital under a Matron, Miss Mary Rose Fitzpatrick, a trained nurse, formerly the nurse for the Bull children. Known as VADs, they did not do active nursing but took care of all other aspects of day-to-day life in the hospital. One of their most important duties was to socialize with the recovering officers. Bull remembered them as being “young and lovely”, wearing silk stockings and uniforms designed to be “dainty, becoming, and practical.”⁷

◀ Mary Rose Fitzpatrick, Hospital Matron, around 1917. (PAMA)



▲ Official opening of the Hospital, with (left to right) Wm. Perkins Bull, the Lady Mayoress of London, the Lord Mayor, General Carleton Jones and Maria Bull. (PAMA)



► The Perkins Bull Hospital for Convalescent Canadian Officers at 9 Heathview Gardens, London. (PAMA)



*“In this hospital girls belonging to the best Canadian families attend to the cooking and to the serving of the meals to the rooms, to the beds – in a word do everything. It is splendid and we appreciate it.”*wrote Georges Vanier.⁸

The women came from prominent families in Canada and England and likely had no previous experience cleaning and working with invalids. Swept along by patriotism and a desire to serve, the women performed their duties cheerfully. Perhaps not surprisingly, a number of VADs became engaged to Canadians staying at the hospital, including Bulls’ daughter, Dorothy, who married Captain Harry Symons, a young pilot in the Royal Flying Corps.

One of the VADs lost her husband in 1916. Georges Vanier wrote to his mother:

*“Nothing in the trenches has affected me so much as the sight of this heartbroken wife. In this war, a woman’s lot is the most terrible. She has neither the excitement nor the glory but only the awful suspense.”*⁹

◀ Maria (left with dark hat) and Wm. Perkins Bull shaking hands with guests at the opening. (PAMA)

“THE LIFE OF OUR OWN HOUSE”

The hospital constantly held 30 to 40 wounded men, most of whom stayed 2-3 weeks before rejoining their troops. Recovering patients walked across the lane to the Bull home for dancing, and conversation. The Bulls continued to open their home to guests who did not need medical attention, such as Grant McKeough. More than 1000 Canadians passed through the two houses as guests or patients.

There were often so many guests for dinner that the hospital and the massive dining table was pressed into use for patients and guests alike. At home or at the hospital, Bull headed up the dinner table where he carved magnificent roasts and encouraged lively conversation. In 1918, he wrote to Grant McKeough’s mother, noting:

*“[we] are so glad to have word from the homes of the boys who gather around us there. We are always happy to have them, to endeavour to make them happy and they are always so cheerful and contented that they are the life of our own house ...the boys who have honoured us with their company of friendship have without exception given good account of themselves at the front.”*¹⁰

The Hospital Garden



Baseball snapshots from a patient's album



Guest Book

George R. I.

Nov 30th 1916.

May R



Hospital Guest Book signed by the King and Queen

All images from PAMA

Washing the Office windows at the Hospital



Perkins Bull (left) with patients and VADs ▲



A nearby convalescent hospital



Bull travelled during the war and when in Canada met with both the parents of Grant McKeough and Georges Vanier. In Montreal he met the Vaniers for dinner and gave them a number of war souvenirs sent by their son.¹¹

Maria was the Matron in Chief and worked quietly behind the scenes, slipping small gifts into the officers' suitcases before they left. She was deeply appreciated by the men, most of whom had not seen mothers, wives or sweethearts since leaving Canada. As Grant McKeough wrote to his mother, "Mrs Bull is wonderfully good to us and [the house] is just like a second home to go to."¹²

Visiting politicians and dignitaries also enjoyed the Bull's hospitality, including Canadian Prime Minister Robert Borden. Grant McKeough wrote of one such event:

*"After dinner, we had the usual speeches and before Sir John spoke we gave him three cheers. During his talk, which was rather long, he said 'I don't know many of you, but you seem to be splendid examples of Canada's young manhood.' ... after dinner we came over here to the dance (the house). The Forestry Battalion orchestra furnished the music."*¹³



Patients and VADs outside the Hospital. (PAMA)



Patients dressed up for a mock 'fancy dress' ball. Alfred Langsford Robinson fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University Library

A visit in December, 1916, by King George V and Queen Mary gave the project encouragement and recognition. Certainly the Bulls had found favour with the monarch as fresh game from the King's Sandringham estate from time to time found its way to the hospital kitchen. Perkins Bull gave the Queen a hospital pin mounted in a gold key. Shortly afterward he was at a reception attended by the Queen. He thanked her for appearing with the pin. She replied that she always wore it when she expected to meet Canadians.¹⁴

Royal visits aside, McKeough's recounting of a Sunday morning suggests that relations between the Bull's guests and the neighbours were sometimes less than ideal:

*"Yesterday morning we went down to breakfast in our dressing gowns. At eleven o'clock, the boys staying at the hospital played a game of baseball, much to the disgust of people going to church."*¹⁵

The contrast between life on the front and in Putney Heath was remarkable. The mud, cold and other horrific conditions in the trenches were shared by officer and soldier alike. For a short while, the Bull hospital and home provided a much needed respite. Clean bedding, good food, music and exposure to art and entertainment were reminders that civilization had not completely been blown to pieces.



Baseball was played between the House and the Hospital teams. (PAMA)



A snapshot of life in the trenches in France.

The men who passed through the hospital and Bull home often formed close friendships with one another and with the Bulls. In military terms, a mess is the place where military personnel socialize, eat, and (in some cases) live, and so the Perkins Bull Hospital Officers' Mess was initiated.

The role of honour for the Mess includes many well known Canadians. Canada's top flying ace, William Avery 'Billy' Bishop, stayed in the hospital on more than one occasion. Bishop's superior eyesight and daring tactics kept him alive at a time when the life expectancy of a new pilot was a mere 11 days. For his conspicuous bravery and extreme devotion to service, Bishop received the Victoria Cross, the Empire's highest military decoration.

Georges Vanier, who stayed at the Hospital while recovering from shellshock and later the loss of a leg, received a Military Cross and the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) for his gallantry. Vanier returned to Canada where he eventually became one of the country's most respected and deeply loved Governors-General, serving in that role from 1959-1967.



▲ Georges Vanier

George P. Vanier

Perkin Bull ►
Hospital menu
(PAMA)



Court Circular.

BUCKINGHAM PALACE, Thursday.

Field-Marshal the Duke of Connaught visited the King and Queen this morning.

Lieut. General Sir Percy Lake had the honour of being received by his Majesty.

The King and Queen, attended by the Lady Amphill and Commanter Sir Charles Cust, Bt., M.N., visited the Perkins Bull Hospital for Convalescent Canadian officers at Putney Heath this afternoon.

Bull Hospital
ent Canadian Off
NEY HEATH, S.W.

FOR THE BARONESS OF CARRINGTON

Non President
HONORARY GENERAL, R.C.M.D. P.C. K.C. M.C.
Member of the Executive of Canada

Non Vice President
GENERAL C. L. FOSTER, C.M.
General Medical Officer, R.C.M.D.

Chairman
A. FREEDS HULL, K.C., M.B.

Hon. Secretary
C. L. FOSTER, C.M.

Medical Officer
DR. J. B. B. B. B. B.

Medical Officer
DR. J. B. B. B. B.

Medical Officer
DR. J. B. B. B. B.



▲ Billy Bishop

GRATITUDE AND APPRECIATION

In the spring of 1917 a group of patients at the Convalescent Hospital presented a large sterling silver tankard to Maria Bull. Her many quiet deeds of kindness had not gone unnoticed.

The tankard is a copy of a piece created around 1688. When presented, it bore the Bull family coat of arms, and notations that the hospital had been opened by the Lord Mayor of London, and visited by H.M. King George V and H.M. Queen Mary. It is engraved with the names of many of the officers who had passed through the hospital and then died in battle, as well as those who received military distinctions.

Another gift of the patients was a book of poetry, given to VAD Gwendolyn Holman in 1917. The book was inscribed with the names of 34 patients "as an appreciation."¹⁶

Back in Canada, the families of the men befriended by the Bulls remained appreciative of the care they had received. From Chatham, the McKeoughs sent parcels of sugar and maple syrup (both scarce at the time) for Mrs. Bull to use. Grant McKeough looked through the antique shops for brass, bronze or ceramic bulls for Mrs. Bull "as she is

collecting them” and when he finally got to France in the summer of 1918, bought French eau d’cologne for Mrs. Bull and Dorothy, and matches for Louis, the ‘wonderful’ cook at the hospital. To thank Bull at war’s end, McKeough presented him with a 100-pound shell casing. He told his parents “Mr. Bull said that no other house in England had a better souvenir of the war than the shell case which I gave him. He is just tickled to death.”¹⁷

The Bulls could empathise with the families of officers as Perkins’ brother, Major Jeffrey Bull, was on active service in France with the 75th Battalion. Like so many Canadian families, they experienced the loss of a loved one when Jeffery was killed at Amiens in August, 1918, just a short time after he was awarded the DSO. McKeough noted “the whole family are badly broken up over the death in action of Jeff.”¹⁸

LEGACIES

The war ended in November, 1918. Of the 690,000 who enlisted, 67,000 Canadians died, and another 173,000 soldiers were injured. The “War to End All Wars,” as it was known, wiped out an entire generation of young Canadian



Dorothy Bull, her brother Major Jeffrey Bull, and two VADs on the stairs of the Hospital around 1917. (PAMA)

men. It is also remembered as the war that created a strong sense of nationhood for Canada.

The hospital stayed open into 1919 as the process of recovery and demobilization took many months after Armistice. Georges Vanier was able to stay at the hospital after the amputation of his leg in 1918 in order to be fitted with a prosthesis. He wanted to return to Canada under his own power, not as an invalid.

The Bulls lived in London until 1928. Both their home and the house used as a hospital survived WW2 and exist today as private residences.

The silver tankard, known as the Loving Cup, found another use after the war. A number of officers married women who served in the Voluntary Aid Detachment at the hospital, and the Loving Cup served at the christening of children born to those couples as well as several of Perkins and Maria's grandchildren. During WW2 it was placed in the care of the High Commission of Canada in London, for safekeeping.

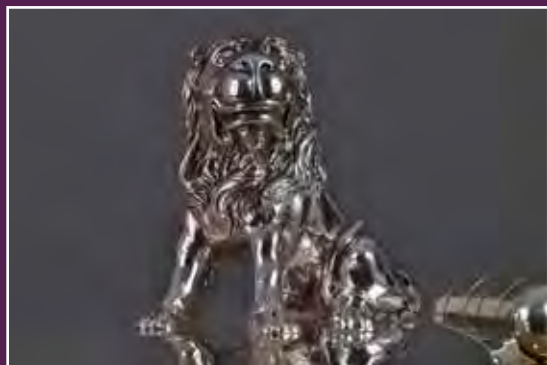
After the war, Grant McKeough returned to Chatham and joined his family's law firm. He saw action again in WW2, becoming a Lieutenant Colonel. McKeough had three children, including Darcy who became a Member of the Provincial Parliament and served in the cabinets of Premiers John Robarts and William Davis.

In the 1930s, Perkins Bull embarked on an enormous research project: documenting the history of his family, and his home county of Peel. Before long he had converted the basement of his estate at Lorne Hall in Rosedale into a office. From there his staff coordinated a massive research project that spread out into every corner of Peel, and beyond.



An unusual hockey trophy, selected and presented by Wm. Perkins Bull after his return to Canada. (PAMA)

Cartoon poking
fun at Bull's
family connection
with Jersey
cattle. (PAMA)



Detail from Loving Cup. (PAMA)

Families of early settlers were contacted directly and sent questionnaires, the answers to which now form the nucleus of the Wm. Perkins Bull collection. Art, artifacts, photographs and textual records combined to create a valuable record of early days.

Maria Bull was always his best friend and supporter. She continued to be held in high esteem by all those who had known her in London. At the time of her death in 1934, Georges Vanier wrote in a letter to the Times “[the officers] were better men for having known this noble and understanding woman, and for having followed the counsel so gently given, and strengthened by the beautiful example of her devotion and sacrifice.”¹⁹

After Maria's death in 1934, Perkins Bull lost much of his enthusiasm for the research project. Nonetheless, a dozen books were produced which illuminated the history, literature and life of Peel County. Several books and bits of an autobiography remained in manuscript form. After his death in 1948, the research material went to a number of institutions. Many of the artifacts collected were put on display when the first Peel Art Gallery and Museum opened in 1968.

In the 1990s, the Peel Archives, with the generous assistance of Professor Thomas H. B. Symons, Bull's grandson, began

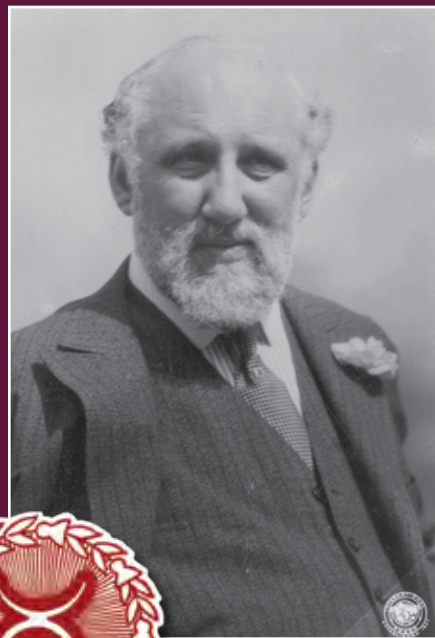
to bring the research collection back together under the roof of the then Peel Heritage Complex. Since that time the collection has been used by thousands of researchers uncovering family and community history. In addition to the voluminous archives, it includes an extensive collection of art, of pioneer museum pieces, and other memorabilia.

The story of the Perkins Bull Hospital for Convalescent Canadian Officers is one that could have remained a series of notes in Bull's files. Professor Symons, whose parents, Dorothy Bull and Harry Symons, met at the hospital, has kept the story alive through his unfailing belief that the contribution of the Bulls during WW1 ought not to be forgotten. He has graciously lent the hospital's registers and other records, and through the Perkins Bull Foundation, enabled PAMA to commission a custom enclosure for the Loving Cup.

The motto of the Bull family, "hitherto", means "until this time." During the war it was a frequent scoff at death and injury by soldiers who celebrated their survival by proclaiming "hitherto" – so far so good.

The contributions of the Bulls to Canada's war effort, hitherto unknown, now live on through the story of the hospital.

Wm Perkins Bull,
around 1936.
(PAMA)



Bull family crest
with motto and
horoscope sign of
Taurus "the Bull".
(PAMA)

ENDNOTES

- ¹ S. Ann Carruthers and W. Darcy McKeough, *McKeough Letters* (Chatham: Ont., Authors, 2006) pg. 466
- ² Ancestry.com. *London, England, Electoral Registers, 1832-1965* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010. Accessed Feb. 28, 2013. Original data: *Electoral Registers*. London, England: London Metropolitan Archives.
- ³ Carruthers and McKeough, *McKeough Letters*, pg. 655
- ⁴ Wm. Perkins Bull fonds, 1994.022, autobiographical notes, folder 4, pg. 221 at the Peel Art Gallery Museum and Archives
- ⁵ Wm. Perkins Bull fonds, 1994.022, autobiographical notes, folder 10, pg. 8 at the Peel Archives, (PAMA)
- ⁶ Deborah Crowley, ed. *Georges Vanier, soldier: the wartime letters and diaries, 1915-1919* (Toronto: Ont., Dundurn Press, 2000) p.154
- ⁷ Wm. Perkins Bull fonds, 1994.022, autobiographical notes, folder 4, pg. 222 at the Peel Archives, (PAMA)
- ⁸ Crowley, *Georges Vanier*, pg. 155
- ⁹ Ibid, pg. 165
- ¹⁰ Carruthers and McKeough, *McKeough Letters*, pg. 533
- ¹¹ Crowley, *Georges Vanier*, pg. 199
- ¹² Carruthers and McKeough, *McKeough Letters*, pg. 476
- ¹³ Ibid pg.. 493
- ¹⁴ Wm. Perkins Bull fonds, 1994.022, autobiographical notes, folder 10, at the Peel Archives, (PAMA)
- ¹⁵ Carruthers and McKeough, *McKeough Letters*, pg. 469
- ¹⁶ Accession, 2003.001 at the Peel Archives, (PAMA)
- ¹⁷ Carruthers and McKeough, *McKeough Letters*, pg. 652
- ¹⁸ Ibid pg. 582
- ¹⁹ Bull, William Perkins. *Spadunk or From Paganism to Davenport United*. (Toronto: Ont., The Perkins Bull Foundation / George J. McLeod Ltd., 1935) p. 12



Many marriages resulted from romances kindled at the Perkins Bull Hospital.

"The Gairdner – Smith wedding party photographed in the garden at the rear of the residence of Mr. Perkins Bull Esq., K.C.; 'Wynnfield', Putney Heath, London, on January 30th. Left to right: Miss Edith Fergusson, Miss Kathleen Agar (bridesmaids); the groom: Major Jim Gairdner of Toronto, son of the night editor of the Mail and Empire; the bride: Miss Normal Ecclestone Smith, VAD. of Oakville; Mr. Perkins Bull, who gave the bride away; Lieut. Adland, the best man, and Miss Dorothy Perkins Bull, the VAD Commandant of the Perkins Bull Hospital incidentally the first bridesmaid at the wedding." (PAMA)



PAMA

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